

SS Mary and Michael Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119617
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	313359
Inspection date	12 December 2007
Reporting inspector	David Earley

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	125
School	
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Roger Mason
Headteacher	Mrs Cathryn Wilkinson
Date of previous school inspection	1 January 2004
School address	Castle Lane Garstang Preston Lancashire PR3 1RB
Telephone number	01995 603023
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: progress in Key Stage 2, the effectiveness of assessment and tracking in helping to raise standards and the consistency of teaching. Evidence was gathered from observations of lessons, discussions with staff, pupils and governors; looking at pupils' work, school assessment data and documentation. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

This is a small school on the edge of Garstang, near Preston, Lancashire. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is below average. Most pupils are of White British origin. A small number of pupils learn English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. The school has achieved the Healthy Schools' Award and the Eco Schools' Bronze award.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with some outstanding features. The headteacher, well supported by the senior management team, staff and governors, provides strong leadership and has a clear vision for raising standards and improving provision. These factors make an important contribution to the high standards and good achievement and pupils' excellent personal development. One parent, speaking for many, commented that this is, 'A fantastic school with wonderful caring staff and happy well cared for children'.

Achievement is good and standards are above average for all pupils whatever their backgrounds. When children enter the Foundation Stage (Reception), standards are broadly typical for children of this age. They get off to a flying start, make good progress and achieve well so that by the time they enter Year 1 most have reached the goals expected for their age. Good progress continues in Key Stage 1. In the teacher assessments in 2006 in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2, the school's results were significantly above average. Results were similarly above average in 2007, as they have been for the past four years. In the tests at the end of Year 6 in 2006, the results in English, mathematics and science were significantly above average, maintaining the standards of the previous three years. Results in 2007 dipped to average. This was because there had been a period of staffing instability in Key Stage 2 leading to some underachievement. Staffing is now stable and the underachievement has been successfully addressed by improved teaching so that pupils make good progress. School data and inspection evidence indicate that pupils in the current Years 2 and 6 are on track to reach above average standards.

Pupils' personal development, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is excellent. This is an important factor in the high standards because pupils have very positive attitudes to learning. Personal development is enhanced by the very strong Christian values which lie at the heart of all the school does. Pupils have a very good understanding of how to lead healthy lifestyles. Behaviour is excellent and pupils say that they enjoy coming to school. This is evident by the way they come eagerly into school at the beginning of the day and by their good attendance. Relationships are excellent and most pupils show high levels of confidence and self-esteem. The school lies at the hub of the parish and through this and other wider community involvement pupils make a very good contribution to the community. The school council provides a very active voice for pupils. The activities of buddies and fundraising events for charities help to reinforce their sense of responsibility and concern for others. Pupils are very skilled at working collaboratively and have very good opportunities to develop enterprise skills. This prepares them well for the next stage in their education and for their future life.

Teaching and learning are consistently good and some excellent teaching was seen during the inspection. Lessons are usually lively and interesting so that pupils are eager to learn and improve their work. Teachers use assessment effectively to provide work which is well suited to different ages and abilities in the mixed-age classes. Relationships are excellent and pupils are confident to talk to teachers and classmates about their work and this helps them to improve. Lessons are usually brisk and move pupils' learning on at a good rate. Because teachers have good subject knowledge, they ask challenging questions that encourage pupils to think hard about their tasks. For example, in the excellent teaching in Year 6, pupils increased their understanding of fractions and percentages because they were challenged to use a wide range of strategies in their calculations. There are some good examples of marking but its quality is not consistent so that some pupils are not clear about how they could improve.

A good curriculum complements the good quality of teaching and learning. It is well planned to ensure that work is well suited to individual ages and needs. There is a good focus on the skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) and these are extended by their use in other subjects. The school makes good use of visits, visitors and extra-curricular activities to enrich the curriculum. There are good links with outside agencies, particularly in support of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and pupils who learn English as an additional language. This helps them to progress at the same rate as their peers. The school makes good use of staff expertise, for example in art and music, in order to extend the curriculum, and this is further extended by weeks focused on subjects such as science, art and health education.

Care, guidance and support are good. The school provides excellent pastoral care, enhanced by the very strong family feeling within the school and wider parish community. Families are well known to staff and there are excellent links between home and school. Child protection and health and safety arrangements are fully implemented and government recommendations for safeguarding pupils are carefully followed. The school is making good use of its recently developed assessment and tracking systems in order to check progress and set targets for improvement so that pupils and teachers know increasingly clearly what needs to be done in order to raise standards. The skills of pupils in assessing how well they are learning, in order to be better informed about the progress they need to make, are at an early stage of development.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides energetic and determined leadership and shares her clear vision for improvement with staff and governors, leading to good academic standards, and excellent personal development. They have created a very caring and inclusive atmosphere, which meets the ideals in the school's mission statement to, 'Recognise the unique value of all who are members of the school community'. Recent improvements to the school's evaluation of its performance are leading to good improvement planning. For example, analysis of tracking data led to strategies which have raised standards in writing. Most parents have very positive views of the school and are fully involved in their children's learning. Parents of one child commented that this is an excellent school and that their child prefers school to holidays.

Governance is good. Governors are supportive and make good use of the expertise of members. They know the school well and this helps them to play an important role in holding the school to account for its performance. Progress since the previous inspection has been good. Strong leadership, realistic evaluation of performance and a strong commitment to raise standards and improve provision give the school good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision in the Foundation Stage is good and children make good progress. Relationships are excellent and there is a very warm and welcoming atmosphere in the Foundation Stage with close links between home and school. This is why most pupils settle in very quickly. The curriculum is well planned with lots of interesting and exciting things to do so that children want to learn. This is enhanced by the good teaching. Teachers know children very well and track their progress carefully so that they present a wide range of tasks which are suitably challenging. There is a good balance between teacher directed and independent activities, leading to growing independence and confidence. Leadership and management in the Foundation

Stage are good. Performance is carefully evaluated, giving staff a good understanding of how to raise standards and improve provision.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the marking of work so that it consistently shows pupils how to improve.
- Improve the skills of pupils in assessing how well they are learning so that they understand more clearly the progress they need to make.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

14 December 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of SS Mary and Michael Catholic Primary School, Lancashire, PR3 1RB

Thank you for your very warm welcome when I visited your school. Yours is a good school and some parts are excellent. I was very impressed by your courtesy and good manners and by the way you all look after each other like in a big family. You told me that you feel safe and well cared for and you also told me about how you stay fit by eating healthily and getting plenty of exercise. When I met the school council I found out about all the things they do to make the school a better place and about how the buddies and friendship bench are helpful to others.

These are some of the things your school does well:

- you work hard and do well in your lessons
- your behaviour is excellent and you get on well with each other
- lessons are interesting so that you want to learn
- you go on interesting visits and have lots to do in clubs after school
- the school is an important part of the parish and local community and you do well to raise funds for charities.

These are some of the things to make your school even better:

- I would like the marking of your work to tell you more often how to improve
- it would help your learning if you were to get better at using sign posts like WALT and WILF so that you know how well you are doing.

Thank you again for making me so welcome. I enjoyed your singing and acting during the nativity play and I am sure your families and friends enjoyed it as much as I did.

Yours sincerely

David Earley

Lead inspector